

Dems eye SEP 11 2004 obstacles to small business

By SUSAN M. COVER
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA — Homegrown businesses with local owners and local workers are the future of the Maine economy, not big corporations from away, a group of House Democrats said Friday.

The group, led by House Majority Leader John Richardson, D-Brunswick, stood inside Kennebec Tool & Die on Church Hill Road to announce a new plan aimed at making it easier to do business in Maine.

"What we found was that Maine was already doing a lot for small business, but it is not necessarily coordinating its efforts," Richardson said.

The plan, which will remain a draft while legislators get input from businesses around the state, aims to reduce paperwork, help Maine businesses with financial matters, and better educate community-college students so they're prepared to start their own businesses.

Among the specifics offered so far:

- Establish a statewide business-assistance phone line.
- Establish a business court to expedite business-related litigation.
- Help students who live and work in Maine repay their college loans.

BILL

OF RIGHTS

To see the entire plan, go to
<http://www.legislature.maine.gov/housedems>.

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- Reduce the capital gains tax for investments.
- Expand "seed funds" to businesses that are not currently eligible.

The overall theme — growth from within — originated with Rep. Stanley Moody, D-Manchester. He described his idea as a new economic development strategy for the state.

"It requires a change of mindset that would position Maine as a place where the welcome mat is rolled out for people with ideas and the will to turn them into results," he said.

Richardson, Moody and several other House Democrats met for seven months to work on the plan and a "Maine Small Business Bill of Rights."

They will now hit the road to visit with small-business owners in Augusta, Bath, Bangor and other places.

In January, the group hopes to introduce legislation based on their original plan and the input they get from business owners.

Republicans said they hope Democrats are serious about focusing on small business, noting

BUSINESS FORUM

A forum to get input on the House Democratic small business plan will be held from 7:30-9 a.m. Sept. 21 in the University of Maine at Augusta student life building.

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**Rep. Nancy Smith
D-Monmouth,**

that it is a legislative election year.

"It has been 30 years of a Democrat majority that has put Maine in the dubious position of having the second-highest tax burden in the nation, along with being the second most difficult state in which to create and grow a business," Assistant

House Minority Leader David Bowles, R-Sanford, said in a statement from the House Republican Office.

Charles "Wick" Johnson, owner of Kennebec Tool & Die, said most of his workers were born and raised within a 30-mile radius of the plant. Health care and workers' compensation costs are two areas where he needs relief, Johnson said.

Gov. John Baldacci said communities can no longer rely on one big business to employ most of their people. Competition from other states and international markets make it too risky for Maine to cling to a few large businesses, he said.

"By growing small business, we're diversifying our economy," he said.

The work group, which includes six central Maine legislators, has many small-business owners. Among them is Rep. Nancy Smith, D-Monmouth, who said she understands the heartache of figuring out how to make ends meet.

"I am committed to working towards a concrete goal of getting every small business in Maine to add one new worker to their payroll," she said.

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